

# Maria Montessori

*Discover her life as a scientist  
and explore her work through play*





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DIPARTIMENTO DI  
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Maria Tecla Artemisia Montessori is a scientist who has left an indelible mark on the culture of education and whose popularity has been growing in Italy in recent years. Probably due to her ideas that were far too innovative for the spirit of the times, combined with a biographical history that was nonconformist to say the least, Maria Montessori became famous worldwide before she did in her own land of origin. However, starting from the numerous initiatives dedicated to her and her thought on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of her birth, there has been a revival of interest and a new wave of attention.

Among the ideas left to us as a legacy, the centrality of boys and girls in educational processes is probably the pivotal concept of her entire extensive production. Maria Montessori indelibly carves the image of this centrality, declaring that «the child is the teacher». This phrase condenses theoretical visions and binding guidelines for educational practice: from a theoretical standpoint, there is a proposal to radically change the idea that boys and girls must be taught things by someone designated to teach them, who determines what, how, and when must be learned.

In the concise Montessorian expression is condensed the idea that boys and girls can learn according to their own rhythms, interests, and motivations with a sort of self-government that decenters the figure of the teacher, turning roles and functions upside down. The clear direction Maria Montessori gives is to follow boys and girls along the paths they trace themselves, to be behind them instead of in front, to use that stepped-back position to observe them and provide them with the appropriate support to achieve their development more deeply and significantly, rather than dragging them toward goals set by someone else.

For these reasons, it seems important that boys and girls can directly get to know the history of this important figure, who committed herself so deeply precisely to their well-being and to indicating the ways to support it.

**Paola Nicolini**  
*University of Macerata*



**Maria Tecla Artemisia Montessori**, known worldwide as **Maria Montessori**, was born in Chiaravalle on August 31, 1870. Daughter of an Emilian father, Alessandro Montessori, and a mother from the Marche region, Renilde Stoppani, Maria came into the world in a house overlooking Piazza Mazzini, at number 10, in the small town in the Marche. This home is now a Museum, inaugurated on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of her birth, in the presence of many authorities, many fellow citizens, and her great-granddaughter Carolina.

### **Education: an uphill journey**

When Maria was only 3 years old, the family moved to Florence and shortly after to Rome, which had become the capital of Italy only a few years prior. Once in Rome, Maria was enrolled by her parents in the municipal preparatory school of Rio Ponte, then in a government technical school for girls, the «Regia scuola tecnica» (today the «Leonardo Da Vinci» Technical Institute, in via degli Annibaldi), from which Maria graduated with excellent results, ranking among the top ten students with a score of 137/160.

Maria was passionate about scientific subjects, especially mathematics and biology, but she could

not immediately fulfill her dream of enrolling in the Degree in Medicine because she did not hold a Classical High School diploma (Liceo Classico), which was required at the time to access that type of study. To bypass the obstacle, Maria enrolled in the Science degree program, which allowed her, after two years of attendance, to finally enroll in Medicine at the University of Rome La Sapienza, even though her father wanted her to pursue studies to become a teacher.

In fact, at that time - the end of the 1800s - not many women went to university, and the profession of a doctor was considered more suitable for men. University life for a woman back then was indeed difficult, especially in a scientific faculty composed predominantly of men. Working alongside exclusively male students was frowned upon, not to mention that for study purposes it involved dealing with naked bodies that had to be observed and manipulated. Consequently, Maria was forced to practice anatomy mostly at night, alone, to avoid causing a scandal.

For these reasons, Montessori was among the first Italian women to graduate in medicine, specializing in neuropsychiatry in 1896. In the meantime, she had studied pediatrics at the Children's Hospital, women's illnesses in the wards of San Giovanni



in Rome, and men's illnesses at Santo Spirito, also in Rome. Even as a student, she proved to be a brilliant researcher, winning prizes and prestigious work placements.

Crucial in directing Maria toward her future way of thinking were the lectures on experimental hygiene given by Prof. Angelo Celli, who was among the first to understand that diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis are often linked to conditions of educational poverty and social marginalization. Indeed, the poorer the knowledge of basic hygiene rules and the less time available to dedicate to the care of oneself and one's children, the higher the chance became of contracting these types of diseases, which find fertile ground in unclean environments and spread through contagion.

### **Interest in early childhood education and women's emancipation**

It was thanks to her appointment as an assistant at the psychiatric clinic of the University of Rome that Maria began to take an interest in children with mental disabilities. She studied the works of Itard and Séguin, who were among the first scholars to address the rehabilitation of so-called «abnormal» boys and girls through appropriate educational paths. Her participation in numerous conferences

dedicated to educational themes in various European cities allowed her to come into contact with and learn about their experimental methods for the rehabilitation of the «mentally deficient», as children with schooling and comprehension difficulties were called at that time.

Parallel to these interests, Montessori showed a strong commitment to the themes of women's emancipation, an issue that concerned her closely and was particularly close to her heart. Her speech at the Women's Congress in Berlin in 1896 remains famous, where she spoke as a representative of Italy in favor of equal pay between women and men. Her participation in that conference had been made possible precisely thanks to a fundraising started by the working-class women of her hometown.

### **Family life: a difficult chapter**

Toward the turn of the century, having become the director of the orthophrenic training school for teachers in Rome, and given her interests directed toward the educational field, Maria also enrolled and graduated in Philosophy. It was during this time that she met her colleague Giuseppe Montesano, collaborating on mental disability in boys and girls. The two also became romantically



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involved, and from their relationship, a son, Mario, was born in 1898. Maria gave birth to him in secret and entrusted him to a family in Vicovaro (a small village in Lazio) because the fact of not being legally married at the time constituted a severe social hindrance, and women in such situations were viewed very negatively. Mario thus grew up with Vittoria Pasquali, although Maria visited him regularly, overseeing his education and growth. Only upon the death of his adoptive mother did Maria want to take her son back with her, but even then, she hid the fact that he was her son, declaring him to be a nephew. The truth about Mario's origins was only revealed in her will. The relationship with Montesano ended when Maria learned that he was going to marry another woman. As is easy to understand, Montesano's decision deeply shocked Maria and brought about a major shift in her life.

### ***The Montessori method takes flight***

Among various important roles, in 1903 Montessori was appointed Second Class Assistant Physician in the management staff of the Italian Red Cross, with a military rank comparable to that of a second lieutenant. In 1904, after obtaining her post-doctoral teaching qualification (*libera docenza*) in anthropology, Maria focused on

infant asylums. Three years later, the first *Casa dei bambini* (Children's House) opened in Rome.

Subsequently, Montessori wrote down the foundations of her Method and held the first training course for teachers on the Montessori method in Città di Castello. Following this course, Baroness Franchetti inaugurated a second *Casa dei bambini* at Villa Montesca in Città di Castello, where Montessori materials were tested. A third *Casa dei bambini* was opened in Pischello, also in Umbria, thanks to the intervention of Marchioness Romeyne, who intended to act in favor of the local children's community. This way, step by step, the Montessori method - based on respect for boys and girls and a continuous focus on supporting their independence - gained strength. It became structured through various trials, growing increasingly known and appreciated.

### **From Italy to the world: American success**

In 1913, upon her arrival in the United States, the *New York Tribune* presented Maria Montessori as «the most interesting woman of Europe». The Montessori method immediately enjoyed good success in North America, so much so that in 1960 Nancy McCormick Rambusch founded the American Montessori Society. In



Italy, a Montessori movement was born, which in 1924 gave rise to the «Scuola magistrale Montessori» (Montessori Teacher Training School) and the «Opera Nazionale Montessori» (National Montessori Foundation). The latter was established as a non-profit organization aimed at the knowledge, dissemination, implementation, and protection of her method.

During the period of the fascist government, after an initial phase in which the Montessori schools were appreciated by the regime, the break soon became definitive: the schools were closed, the Opera Nazionale ceased its activities, and Montessori was forced to leave Italy. During that period, Maria traveled to various countries, spreading the core ideas of her method. On one of these journeys she was in India, where she was surprised by the outbreak of the Second World War and detained with her son as Italian citizens, hence coming from an enemy country. Following her release in 1944, she returned to Europe in 1946, welcomed everywhere with honors.

### **The commitment of her final years**

One of the first things Maria dedicated herself to upon her return to Italy in 1947 was the reconstruction of the Opera Nazionale, which

is still committed today to the dissemination and enhancement of Montessori pedagogical principles. Maria Montessori died on May 6, 1952, in Noordwijk, where she had temporarily moved with her son Mario. On her tomb, the following words can be read in Italian: «I pray the dear children, who can do anything, to join me in building peace among men and in the world».

### **Small great recognitions**

Montessori was the first woman in the history of the Italian Republic to have her likeness printed on a banknote, specifically the 1,000 lire note, which was in circulation before the advent of the euro. Maria was also depicted on several postage stamps and nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, a testament to her dedication to education, in which the theme of peace was always central.

### **The «Chiaravalle-Montessori Foundation» (FCM)**

As early as 1998, the Municipality of Chiaravalle purchased the birthplace of Maria, establishing the «Centro studi casa natale Maria Montessori» (Maria Montessori Birthplace Study Center), upon whose foundations the Chiaravalle-Montessori Foundation continues to work.

In 2007, the «Chiaravalle-Montessori Foundation» (FCM) was established on the initiative of the Municipality of Chiaravalle (Ancona), with the aim of promoting knowledge of the figure and thought of Montessori, managing training courses on Montessorian educational differentiation on behalf of the Opera Nazionale Montessori, organizing dedicated scientific events, and managing the birthplace of Maria Montessori along with her pedagogical library, located in Chiaravalle (Ancona), at 10, Piazza Mazzini.

The Foundation is a training institution accredited by the Marche Region for higher and continuing education. Several courses are authorized by the professional training service of the Marche Region, alongside collaborations with universities in the Marche region to offer specific training related to early childhood activities and for the dissemination of quality education from the very first years of life.

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Opera Nazionale Montessori

Montessori 150 – Maria Montessori: un'aula grande come la regione (unimc.it)

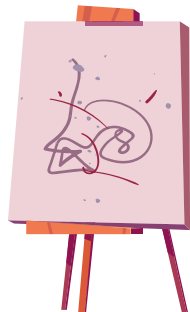
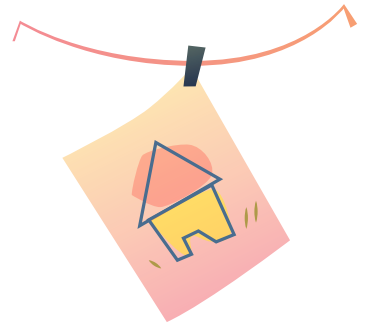
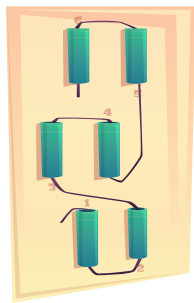
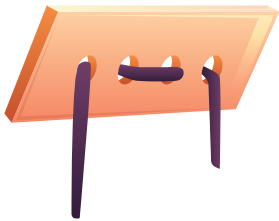
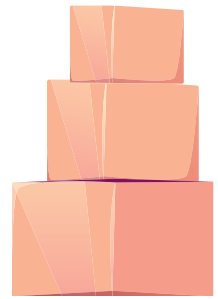
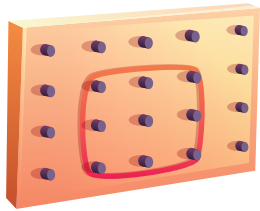
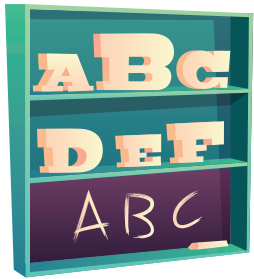
Special thanks to Prof. Nedo Fanelli, Chiaravalle-Montessori Foundation Vice President

# Memory

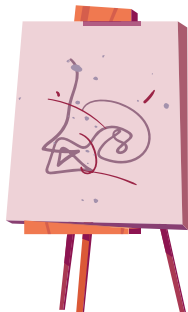
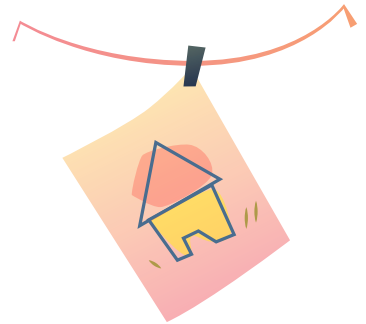
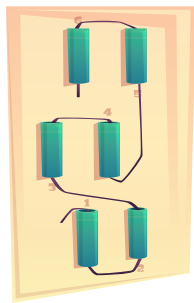
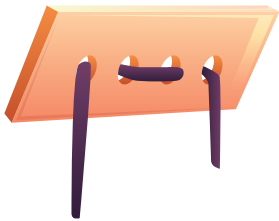
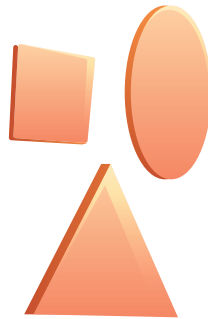
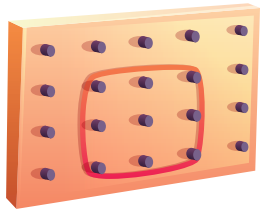
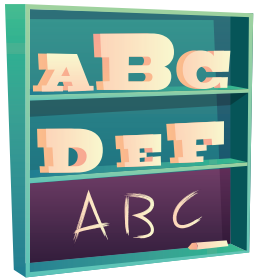
## Instructions

1. Cut out the cards and place them face down.
2. Players take turns revealing two cards at the same time, trying to match the cards that show the same design.
3. The player who successfully matches two cards can continue their turn until they make a mistake.
4. In that case, the turn passes to the next player.

Whoever has the highest number of cards at the end of the game wins.









# Domino

## Instructions

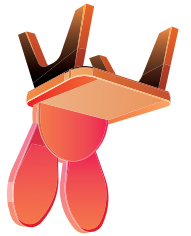
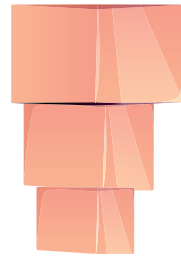
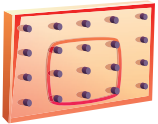
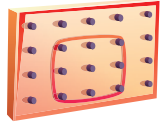
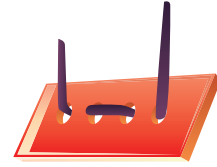
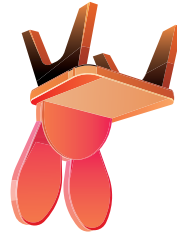
Domino is a board game played using a set of tiles. These are all divided into two sections bearing different or identical pictures.

Tiles with the same picture can be matched, just like in the classic game of dominoes.

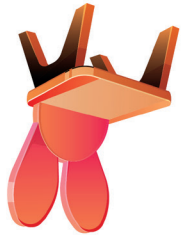
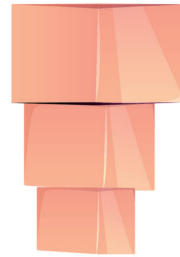
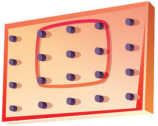
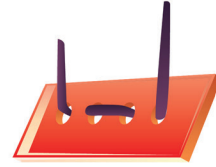
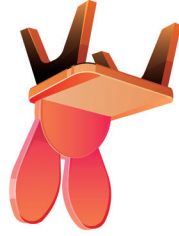
Each player can attach one tile at a time, until no more moves are possible.

If a player has no matchable tiles, they pass their turn. The person left with the fewest tiles at the end wins.













Maria Montessori was and still is a very important figure in the field of education. Maria thought of boys and girls with great respect for their world and with attention to their needs, dedicating her entire life to the study and creation of objects designed to help their minds grow well. The book is divided into two parts: the first tells the story of Maria's life, who was among the first women to obtain a degree in medicine and had to commit herself deeply to achieve this result. In the second part, there are cut-out elements for well-known game activities such as memory and domino, made up of figures that represent the materials designed by Maria.

The purpose is to introduce even the youngest boys and girls to this female figure, who left an important legacy to be known and shared, at all ages.



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